Dancing With The Count

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Dancing With The Count

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Neither seasoned pro Will Graham or celebrity chef Hannibal Lecter really wanted to be the first same sex pairing on Dancing With The Stars. But that was exactly what was going to happen and Will just hoped they could get through the first round of eliminations... Didn’t help that they couldn't stand each other.

Notes

NB: I have only seen bits of DWTS. I'm in the UK so my references for this actually came from the British version - Strictly Come Dancing... With a massive pinch of creative license thrown in. So... just enjoy it and suspend your believe of reality/ignore all the glaring errors.

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“Ms Katz, one more mention of this and I may be tempted to slice you up into perfect proportions and cook you.” Hannibal didn’t even try to hide how insufferable this topic had become.

Quickening his pace a little as they walked toward the studio where his show was filmed - as though he could out run the talented, if irksome agent.

Beverly Katz laughed heartily and slapped Hannibal's back. "Oh Hannibal, you're such a card. Look, I know we've discussed this before-"

"Ad nauseam." He looked over to confirm his suspicion that Bev rolled her eyes at his interruption. Not that it deterred her from continuing.

"It's good money, and you might have fun! Didn't you say you trained in ballet?"

"As a child, Ms Katz. It's hardly the same thing." He wondered if she picked up on his distaste. The idea of dancing in a televised competition amongst other *celebrities* was not something he put in the same category as the refined skill of ballet.

"We need to raise your profile Hannibal, that's the truth of it." She said so firmly that Hannibal stopped and looked at her as they reached the studio door. "Ratings are… good. But they could be better. The Christmas Special is still being finalised, but if you want to get renewed? I'm just saying, something like this wouldn't hurt. People need to see… I don't know, you're very divisive. Viewers describe you as either charming or snobby, we need to get everyone on the side of charming."

Hannibal considered it for a moment and felt a little angry at himself for doing so. "I'm not sure how being a contestant on such a thing would be relevant to the ratings of a culinary show." Hannibal was aware that his tone was a little defensive.

"Hannibal." Bev sighed. "Did you even read the report I sent you? The producers aren't feeling all that fussed about fighting for the renewal. Opinion polls have come back calling you stuffy, uptight, condescending. At this rate even if they do renew they might replace you. You are not the draw they had hoped you would be."

"And *Dancing With The Stars* is my answer to that?" It was a sneer more than a question as Hannibal pulled open the door and started towards the set - a replica of his main restaurant - the Three Michelin Star *The Pomegranate* in Baltimore.

This, along with his three smaller restaurants were all being currently managed by his protege, Alana Bloom. As much as he trusted her, and even enjoyed his show, he was not thrilled with the world of show business and being - what was distastefully termed - a *celebrity chef*. The upside was that he was busier than before, putting in unscheduled time at one of the restaurants between filming, and being able to ignore any niggling wants for a social life.

It wasn't something he had ever really planned. A book deal had become several, they had become guest appearances and suddenly he had his own show - *Dining With The Count.* And in the end it was a good excuse for keeping people at a distance in an industry that focused on the social.

But now he was having to do the most ridiculous things in order to ensure the success of something he had found himself in. He would be just as happy for the show to end as long as he had something else to keep him occupied - maybe open another restaurant.

Unfortunately it wasn't as simple as that. He had a contract and as pleasant as Ms Katz thought she was being, she had been sent from the agency that managed him. So protest as he might, they would have him doing something like this sooner or later. And... he did enjoy dancing.

“Fine.” He huffed, trying not to sound quite as petulant as he felt. “Accept the offer, and make the arrangements.”

“Wonderful!” Bev grinned, pulling some papers from her bag. “I already did. If you could just sign these? Then it’s all official and we can get the ball rolling. Dining With The Count wraps a week Friday, the following Monday you will fly out to L.A. and begin the initial training before they start filming. A week of general fitness and making sure you’re good to go and what level you’re at. Then a week with your dance partner to plan and rehearse your first routine.”

Hannibal’s anger rumbled at her presumption, but he knew there was no arguing with her. “And the Christmas Special? Won’t the filming for that need to take place during filming the dance show?”

“Hannibal.” Bev looked at him firmly. “I sincerely believe there is every chance you won’t make it past week two. But if you turn out to have success, we can work out a schedule. It’ll be tight but… think of the fun!”

Hannibal glared at her as he took the papers. She smiled and started to walk away.

“Wait. Beverly, when will I know who my dance partner will be? I would prefer if she has been classically trained.”

Bev seemed to hesitate, which Hannibal didn’t like one bit, before replying - “it’s all in the information there.”

Hannibal looked down and flicked through the papers until he got to a profile, partly a resume, partly a photo journal of the person matched to be his dance partner for the show -

Will Graham.

Hannibal’s jaw clenched and he looked up to see Beverly Katz disappearing back through the door.

A male dancer? Was this some sort of stunt?

*

“What?!” Will almost fell out of the chair he had just taken opposite Jack Crawford. He knew something was up when he’d got called to the exec producer’s office rather than just getting a call like the other three seasons he’d been on as a professional dancer. He figured it could be a contract negotiation, that he would likely not be called for a meeting if they were letting him go. And he couldn’t imagine that anyway - he had been pretty popular the last couple of seasons, especially when he and his partner - grown up child star Abigail Hobbs - got to the semi-finals last year.

This, he had not expected.

“Is there a problem?” Jack’s tone was gruff and Will wondered exactly what right the man had to be shitty about this.

“Um, yes! Yes there’s a problem.” He replied with no little sass.

“But you’re gay aren’t you? You’re ‘out’.” Jack actually looked confused and raised his hands to put air speech marks around *out*.

Will rolled his eyes and grit his teeth. “I fail to see how that is relevant.”

“It makes you pretty much the only candidate.” Jack’s confusion deepened.

Will scrubbed his hands roughly over his face and groaned. “Jack, what the hell! Did it not occur to you to ask me first? What if I don’t want to do this?”

“Well, I guess if you don’t want to, then we can rethink renewing your contract.”

“Are you shitting me? Are you actually blackmailing me?” Will stood up, his chair rocking back and near falling over.

“Blackmail is a very strong word. More, contract negotiations.” Jack replied coolly. “I’m just saying, this is the direction we want to take the show, it’s been decided a lot higher up than me. If you aren’t willing then I’ll have to find someone who is and they will have to take your spot.” Jack shrugged, like it was that simple.

“Fine. Dammit. Who the hell am I being paired with then? I hope at least it’s someone easy on the eye.” Will imagined being lead around the dancefloor by the strong frame of Chris Evans, or Chris Pratt, Chris Hemsworth… he’d even take Chris Pine at a pinch.

“Hannibal Lecter.”

“Who?”

“That Count guy?”

“From Sesame Street?” Will frowned.

“From that cookery show - Dining With the Count.” Jack corrected.

“A celebrity chef?” Will near whined and dropped back down into the chair. “Urgh. Couldn’t it have been someone… I don’t know, interesting?”

“The guy is a Count, Will. From Europe! With a chain of restaurants and a successful TV show. How is that not interesting?”

“Jack, you’re wanting me to do this - it would have been nice to have a choice, and I would have chosen Hollywood eye candy. This Count guy is probably 60 years old and overweight. Does he even speak English?”

“Do you know of any *out* eye candy? I don’t think so.” Jack looked like he had to try real hard not to put air speech marks around - out, again. Eye candy too. He somehow managed it.

“Out? Wait… are you… You’ve specifically chosen a gay celebrity?”

“He’s pansexual apparently.” Jack corrected as though he had a single clue what he was talking about, and then continued when Will gave him a hard stare - “Of course we chose someone gay.”

“I… I mean, I get you want me to do it because your neanderthal brain assumed that as I am gay I’d have no issue dancing on live television with another man… but… Are you giving me a dance partner or a date?” He wasn’t sure whether to be amused or annoyed. Currently he was wavering between the two.

“We need the illusion, Will. No one is going to give a rat’s ass about two guys just dancing together. Half of this show is the audience speculating on whether that onscreen chemistry is real or not. What draw will there be of two guys dancing if there isn’t the chance that they might hook up.” He let out a sigh at having to explain what apparently seemed obvious to him. “Just.. try to imagine it, right? Just let me borrow your imagination on this.”

“I’m imagining it Jack, and it isn’t pretty. Hard to sell potential chemistry with a 60 year old, overweight, stuffy-”

Jack slid something across the desk and Will looked down… at what was clearly a print off of the promo for the show’s website for when the celebrities were announced - complete with picture of Hannibal Lecter.

“Oh.” Will said. He managed to not say aloud - *hubba hubba*

*

The picture did nothing to prepare Will for the real thing.

Hannibal Lecter was imposing, in personality as well as stature. He had a strong frame, toned muscles, a naturally athletic build. And was a complete asshole.

The moment he had arrived it was clear to Will he did not want to be there. Seemed like the whole thing was beneath him. Will had seen it before a couple of times with celebs who had agreed to the show to boost their stock, but luckily had never been partnered with one… until now.

He had sort of done this sneer-frown combination when they were introduced which Will found himself reflecting. Which was… bad. Will was a great dancer, he was even better dancing pairs because he had two things that set him in good stead - empathy and imagination. He had always dreaded being paired with someone he didn’t get on with because there was no fixing that - he would land in a negative feedback loop until everyone was thoroughly miserable. In previous years he’d gotten on with his contestants great, the only reason they hadn’t done better was because the celebs in question got as good as they were going to get.

Will had enjoyed dancing with them because they had enjoyed dancing with him. He could anticipate their moves, even predict their errors on the dancefloor and correct them before they happened. Not having that with someone was going to be jarring.

And he did not have that with Count Hannibal Lecter.

This was going to be hard enough - representing as the first same sex pairing on the show, worldwide as far as Will knew. He could foresee them having a much harder job winning over the audience than might usually be expected. If they didn’t get along and had zero chemistry whilst dancing, it was going to be even harder to sell them as a pairing. Dance partners who didn’t get on, didn’t last long. And Will didn’t want them to be out in the first elimination.

The idea actually had been festering since his conversation with uncle Jack - as he was known amongst the dancers. There was something about the idea that made a mockery of being gay as much as it supported it. They would be this year’s novelty act usually reserved for the ‘obviously chosen for comic relief’ celeb. Hell, they might still even be that if this rehearsal was anything to go by.

They had been dancing for two hours, a simple rumba, Will taking the role of the follower and the Count was as stiff and stuffy as his title might suggest. There was no flow, and given that he had clearly danced before - it was disappointing.

After three gruelling hours, where the only words said by Hannibal were the snide responses to Will's instructions, they called it a day.

Will did what he did every year with contestants, and invited Hannibal to have a drink with him so they could discuss their plans for the show.

Hannibal declined, somewhat politely, and Will gave him his number and said to call him if he had any questions but otherwise they'd start rehearsals properly after the weekend. It all left Will with the unshakeable feeling that he had been judged by the man, and found wanting.

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"Hannibal Lecter, you call that man immediately." Bev Katz commanded down the phone when Hannibal relayed to her the events of the first day's rehearsal.

Hannibal held the phone back from his ear for a moment and then huffed. "I don't think I will. The man clearly has as little interest as I do in getting past the first week. I assume he gets paid for the whole season regardless? This whole thing is a joke and I am not comfortable about it at all."

In fact, having left behind hard years of having to work hard to be taken seriously in any aspect of his life because of his openness about his sexuality, he didn't like this one bit. And perhaps he should have blamed the show's producers or even himself for agreeing, but Will made an easier and more immediate focus for his frustration. He knew it was unfair but he also felt disinclined in that moment to address it.

Bev's pause was longer than he would have liked because it meant that she was going to change tactic, and he hated that.

"Okay Hannibal, that's fine. If you want to look like a fool why should I try to stop you."

He sighed, heavily. "What should I do, do you suppose? I danced ballet as a child and through my teens. I have been known to waltz at the appropriate function, but did you think that predisposed me to a talent and liking of the *rumba*?" He was aware of how disdainfully he said the word, and how petulant he sounded. He didn't have a problem with ballroom dancing in general perse, but having educated himself in preparation by watching some older episodes - Hannibal was not struck on the show.

It was vulgar and bright. Many contestants seemed to be there just to be the underdog or play the fool. It was not his idea of dance, despite the high standards - he had to admit - some of them reached. He stopped short of ranting to Bev that he would prefer to see The Nutcracker for the millionth time, than watch another episode of that show - much less be on it. He didn't want to think about the other niggle at the back of his mind - the one that told him there was more to the whole thing than just that. He definitely wasn't inclined to address that.

"Hannibal… are you just being a snob?" Bev asked, amusement lacing the tone of reprimand.

He narrowed his eyes although she couldn't see him. "I am being honest."

“So, yes then.”

Hannibal let out a soft growl that only made Bev Katz chuckle.

“Look, do what you want. But it’s your ratings and renewal at stake here.”

Hannibal huffed again, wishing he wasn’t bothered about either and wondering, not for the first time, how life had brought him to this point. All he had ever wanted to do was create cuisine - excel at the culinary arts and share his creations with the masses. How that had resulted in this, he was still unsure.

He ended his call with Bev and put his phone away. Maybe she was right that he should call Will Graham, but what good would it do? The thought sent a strange flash of anxiety through him - the same one he had over the thought of them dancing together at all. Best he just focus on their rehearsals and get this over with. Chances were high they would succumb to the first elimination.

*

Will had never been nervous like this before a show in any past season. Even when he and Abigail had got to the semi-finals.

Rehearsals had been awful. They barely spoke, they couldn’t find a rhythm together. Will tried not to feel like it was personal - but either way Lecter just clearly did not want to be doing this. He reminded himself that this wasn’t the first year one of them had ended up with a dudd. Will just wished it wasn’t his turn for it considering the situation they been put in this year.

Will found himself hating the rumba even before they took to the stage. It was a stupid choice for the first dance. Comparatively easy to learn, and he had choreographed it so they weren’t in each other’s space more than necessary - nothing too in your face. Barely touching, nothing easily interpreted as anything sexual, sensual or romantic. But he was doubting everything now.

“Our next couple are set to make television history even before they set foot on the stage. Please welcome, dancing the rumba, celebrity chef Count Hannibal Lecter and his dance partner, Will Graham.” The host, Abel Gideon’s, smooth words rang out through the large studio.

There was a hushed silence, even a few gasps, and then some stilted and halting applause. It picked up a little as they moved in from the wings, gave obligatory bows and took up their positions, but was still underwhelming. Perhaps shock as much as any kind of prejudice. Will had already steeled himself for it, but Hannibal suddenly looked like a deer in the headlights. He hadn’t wanted to do this and now he was confronted with the terrifying reality.

Will tried his best to turn it around, and the audience did pick up a little towards the end, but it seemed almost a pity cheer by then, and a little at their expense. They were terrible, he had no doubt. Perhaps the producers were wondering if they should have gone for a female only pairing - at least they would have dazzled with the flare of bright costumes and twirls.

For the first time ever, Will felt uncomfortable on the dancefloor. Dancing always put him at his most vulnerable, but now there was no hiding any flaw, any tiny mistake. When they finally came to an end, he held Hannibal close to him as they panted. He was angry, so angry with Hannibal for not putting in the effort he should, for making him feel this way. But then he felt the man tremble against him and knew he must feel that same vulnerability.

“Time to face the judges.” He breathed out the words and felt Hannibal’s hands grip his own a little tighter before they dropped their pose.

“Well. That was interesting.” Frederick Chilton smarmed at them. Will couldn’t stand the man - his least favourite judge. An actual judgemental asshole who seemed to think he was judging on the World Dance Council, not a reality TV show. “I believe it was supposed to be the rumba, but the similarities to it were few. I would list the ways in which it fell short, but I feel the list in which it was almost passable would be shorter.”

At least the boos from the audience for the show’s nasty judge bolstered Will a little. At least they hated Chilton more than they hated Will and Hannibal, and their dire performance.

Next up was Bedelia, very old school and professional. She quirked her brow at them and then a small smile grew.

“I won’t say that I’m not disappointed. I’ve come to expect better from you Will. And Count Hannibal Lecter…” She let her words sink as she gave him the once over. “Surely they teach nobility some ballroom dance? Maybe you had your mind on something else? A new recipe perhaps?” There was a light laugh from the audience and then she smiled warmly, once she had finished joking at their expense. “I’ll expect more from you next week.”

They both nodded, still panting, as Abel asked the final judge for his response.

“Jimmy?”

“Well.” Jimmy Price clasped his hands together and looked at them both, as though admiring a basket of kittens. “I can’t say I don’t wish for better. But I can tell you how pleased I am to see this. In all the years I danced professionally, it isn’t something I thought I’d ever see. And I know that next week you *will* be better.” It was an order really and Will felt a burn at the thought of disappointing the judge he’d become pretty fond of.

“There we go, we’ll all be looking forward to what you come up with next week.” Abel smiled to them and the camera at once and then indicated for them to go to the dancers area for their scores. It was a blur to Will as the other dancers welcomed them, again stilted and commiseratory. He wondered if it was the worst any act had ever done even on the first show?

The scores were given -

Frederick - “Two.”

Bedelia - “Three.”

Jimmy - “Four.”

There were polite claps amongst the dancers but Will was filled with too much anger and upset to even take that in.

*

“This is what I didn’t want to happen.” Will’s jaw ached with how tense his muscles were. He slumped down into the makeup chair and put his face in his hands. “I didn’t want us to become the

joke - the gay joke. I didn't want the first same sex pairing on this show to be the season's novelty act."

The words, intentionally or not, cut through Hannibal. "I'm sorry, Will."

He meant it so sincerely. He hadn't wanted to be here, and although he hadn't wanted them to be a novelty act either, he hadn't put in the effort to ensure they weren't. He just hadn't thought about what it would be like if they were terrible. And they were terrible.

Hannibal felt every wrong step in his bones and knew it. He hadn't done his best in rehearsals and when he got on the stage in front of the audience and cameras he realised the enormity of it. He had been too much of a snob to see it before, and then it was too late. Too bullheaded to admit the deeper reason that he was resisting this.

"Thank god there are no eliminations in the first week." Will muttered before adding even more quietly. "Though maybe that would have been for the best."

The weight of Will's disappointment was almost crushing and Hannibal found himself resolving to do better in the next week of rehearsals, despite his own uncertainty of whether he'd rather just quit now or attempt to adapt to this new situation.

*

Hannibal missed another step. And it wasn't for lack of rehearsal or ability, it was the chemistry between them. It was completely off. And the usually empathic Will Graham was struggling to keep them in sync with each other. This week they had the jive, and though Hannibal was trying, they needed to sync up and were falling short.

"Stop." Will snapped in his frustration. He'd never gotten this frustrated with a dance partner before, but then they had always seemed like they wanted to be there. Hannibal Lecter seemed like he wanted to be anywhere else but in the rehearsal studio.

Hannibal righted himself and then waited for Will to continue whilst Will took deep and calming breaths.

"Get your coat." Will growled.

Hannibal raised a brow. "Are you asking me to leave?"

"No. We're going for lunch. I can't do this." Will indicated the pair of them with erratic gestures. "I can't get us ready for the show if we can't connect. You have to allow a certian vulnerability with your dance partner, otherwise you can never connect. We're calling it a day and getting to know each other. If we're lucky, we can salvage this horror show. If not… I don't know." He shrugged. Maybe he could make the choreography a little simpler? Which was frustrating considering the level of ability Hannibal clearly had.

Hannibal frowned but then nodded, looking like he might say something. Will was just about to assume he wasn't when Hannibal seemed for force out the words, an admission -

"You aren't vulnerable Will. Neither am I. I… will admit to holding back. Exactly because I know you need me to be vulnerable and I don't think I can be. But you can't be either Will. Or choose not to be? You are just very good at empathising enough to give the illusion of having dropped your

guard.” Hannibal sucked in a breath, letting it shudder out before he added - “I’m willing to try if you are.”

He didn’t wait for an answer, just turned and walked out, leaving Will stunned in his wake. No one had ever clocked that before. Any and all vulnerability he felt dancing, he kept to himself. He never let anyone close. And, ridiculously, as he was usually so good at reading people, he only realised in that moment - Hannibal didn’t let people close either.

He grabbed his coat and followed Hannibal.

Usually he was very strict on his diet and alcohol intake during shows, but he could think of nothing more appealing in that moment than getting, at the very least, tipsy.

*

Will could tell that Hannibal felt more relaxed in the dining setting, and maybe because they had had a couple of drinks whilst they waited for their lunch to arrive. The bar was quiet and homely. Hannibal said seemed to strangely suit Will - which he decided to take as a compliment given they had already acknowledged they knew little of anything beyond the superficial about each other.

Their conversation had been stilted at first. He asked Hannibal more about his dance background. Hannibal happily indulged with more specifics about his training in ballet as a child. Never to professional level, but it was something he had enjoyed and kept up after his move from Lithuania to France for school until medical school got in the way of it.

Will nearly choked on his Old Fashioned. “You went to medical school?”

Their food was set in front of them before Hannibal had chance to answer, a frown drawing his eyebrows together. “Is it so unbelievable?”

“Well… I mean, how do you go from medical school to glorified cook?” Will asked, not realising he had that jerk grin on his face and that he’d actually been pretty rude, until Hannibal raised a brow. “I mean… chefs are… not glorified cooks, of course. What I meant was…”

“I can only imagine how much disdain you have for someone who has garnered some *celebrity* for being a glorified cook.”

Will was relieved that the words sounded amused and Hannibal was wearing a small smirk. Hannibal took a bite of his food, seemed to consider it for a moment and then truly smiled.

“This is good.”

Will burst out laughing.

“You’re so… I don’t know. I just don’t get you at all. You’re so weird.”

“It’s fine to be weird.” Hannibal countered with conviction and a smile.

Will shook his head and swallowed the last of his drink before starting on his food. “I just mean, I guess you’re not what I expected. I thought you’d be a stuffy old man, so I suppose I wasn’t exactly surprised to find you are a complete-” Will realised his bluntness had got the better of him again and stopped himself short.

“Snob?” Hannibal offered with a wry smile.

Will went a little red and wondered if he should deny that was exactly the word he was about to use. Instead he allowed - “I’m sorry, I can be a little… rude and abrasive. A lot, actually” He gave a nervous chuckle and Hannibal’s smile broke into a wider grin.

“I will admit that I usually detest the rude, but on you I find it amusing. You are quite the singular person, Will.”

Will felt his face redden further, this time with a blush which he tried to hide behind a cough and a frown. At the least he was glad they were getting along, it would make dancing together easier.

They continued to eat as Will redirected to the most important subject. “You don’t want to dance on the show?”

Hannibal set down his fork and looked thoughtfully into the distance before turning to Will. “I was dubious at first I will admit. I don’t consider myself a celebrity, I am not particularly enthused by the idea of celebrity in general. I don’t really watch much television and certainly not reality shows.” He held up his hand as though he expected a refute and then continued - “I, of course, feel the burn of irony that my own show is of that ilk. Though I consol myself that it is educational tool.”

Will found himself grinning. The way Hannibal said it was so self-deprecating. He wished he’d even seen an episode of the show, and considered looking it up online when he got home. He’d be interested to see how the man came across. There was certainly no little charm there and Will would love to see that on the screen and work out how to capture it for their dancing.

Will went back to the question still niggling him. “So… medical school to chef? How does that work?”

He listened to Hannibal tell of his schooling in France, how he finished medical school and moved to the US for further training, only to find his passion transferred to cooking. Having to fend for himself brought him to the interest, which became a hobby and then an all consuming passion. By the time he finished his residency he enrolled in culinary school and hadn’t looked back since. There was something tantalising about the way Hannibal explained that the skills required to perform surgery were also well used in filleting a fish. Will found himself stealing glances at the man’s hands wondering at how they would need to be both powerful and delicate. He had lovely hands.

By the time they paid and left, Will was reflecting that it was the best date he’d been on for a long while. The fact that it was a date left something swirling in his belly that he chose to ignore.

*

“Hannibal, it’s Bev. Call me back when you get this message. We need to talk about the situation. If you don’t know what situation please immediately open your news app and go to the celeb pages. I know I told you to go for that drink but… maybe you should let me know how you want this played? Because right now I’m thinking this could be ratings gold for everyone concerned.”

Hannibal hung up his messages and adjusted his towel. He was still dripping from the shower but wiped a hand to be able to more effective swipe on his phone until he found what Bev was talking about.

A photo of himself and Will Graham, out at lunch - both of them laughing delightedly and clearly enjoying each other's company. The photo caused a swirl of butterflies in him and he studied Will's face - the focus there on Hannibal. They were absorbed with one another if the photo was to be believed. And had they been? Certainly it felt like he had been talking to the real Will for the first time, and that he had allowed the same in return. It had been as terrifying and pleasant as he had suspected it might be.

Finally he moved his attention to the accompanying headline - **Is romance in the air for DWTS's first same sex dance pair?**

The butterflies created a small tornado and Hannibal found he was smiling.

Evolve

Chapter Summary

Things heat up on and off the dance floor

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Over the next few days the tabloids seemed to go nuts. Those expected to have a problem with a same sex pairing, had the expected problems with a same sex pairing. But as a consequence of their candid lunchtime photo combined with their terrible dance, the public had become convinced there was a deeper story. The tabloid rags ran with all kinds of speculative stories - the most popular being that the men had become immediately involved but then had a lover's tiff moments before going on for their first dance.

Will wondered what they might have been saying had they actually done well, and whether it was better this way. Maybe it was? He and Hannibal had laughed about the gossip even if his face had felt as rosy as Hannibal's looked.

They had decided, between them and their agents, to not say anything - no confirmation, no denial. Just a blanket statement from Hannibal's agent Bev Katz, that they were concentrating on the show right now. She had worded it in such a way that it was almost a tease and even Will wondered if he was secretly seeing Hannibal.

No matter what anyone else thought, they were at least dancing better. Rehearsals were going well and they were really getting something good out of the Jive. Again, Will choreographed it so that they were dancing as apart as possible - which was a lot easier for the Jive. The story he came up with for the routine was one of rivals fighting over their prize. It was more of a dance-off, but it worked really well and Hannibal was great.

What surprised Will wasn't the scores - 6 from Frederick, and 7s from the other two - but the cheers of the audience. There was a definite buzz and within the space of one week, and some terribly written clickbait, they had gone from the potential novelty act to real contenders and fan favourites. Despite, or because of those ridiculous gossip pieces, they were being taken seriously and people actually wanted to see them compete.

When they came off stage that second week they were both exhilarated. In the dancers area when they received their scores they found themselves in a spontaneous and hard hug, gripping onto each other despite the presence of their rivals and the cameras. Both delighted beyond reason that they had not landed in the bottom two and were not up for elimination that week.

The success was repeated, the scores rising and cheers increasing as they proceeded to thrill through the following weeks with the Charleston, the Quick Step and the East Coast Swing. All of which Will was able to adapt - turning the dance into something more platonic in nature. Two guys

dancing together as they might in a musical rather than in the traditional ballroom style that might speak of romance.

It wasn't until the week they did the Foxtrot - to an amazing response from audience and judges alike - that Will knew there was a problem.

He had been trying to make it all palatable to the wider audience. To the point where the tabloids were now reporting on their "bromance" style of dancing was to throw people off of their sordid love affair.

The fact was they were seeing a lot of each other outside of the show. It often happened, you become close when working together like this. It had happened with his previous stars to an extent. But this time was different. He enjoyed Hannibal's company more than he wanted to own. They went out for dinner often and had been getting to know each other gradually. Well, he was getting to know Hannibal. He played his own cards as close to his chest as he usually did - just the basics.

It didn't matter how much he liked the guy, Will wasn't in the habit of sharing personal information with anyone these days. The last person he had trusted to that degree wasn't around anymore, and after that it had all just seemed too hard.

The pain of that experience was renewed after the Foxtrot. Great scores again, great reactions from the audience. They had left the studio on a high and eager to get back to rehearsals for the following week, when Will had been intercepted on the way out.

"Will. A word." He turned and saw Jimmy Price leaning next to the exit. Will's smile quickly dropped when he saw the unusually serious look on the judge's face. "I know what you're trying to do Will."

"Huh?"

"You're trying to remove the romance - make it digestible to the sensitive folk out there. Not upset people by being in-your-face gay. I get it, I do. And this isn't about romance - but what it is Will, is about the illusion of romance. We can't fault your technical ability, but I for one am getting bored of this attempt to make brothers out of lovers. I need you to bring it next week Will."

Will let out a shaky breath. He couldn't begin to claim that Jimmy had it wrong, and he knew that it wouldn't likely get them to the finals - it would get too repetitive. But -

"Jimmy, the audience is taking us seriously because it isn't in their face. They don't want to think about two guys dancing together as more than just friends. I… I don't care if we don't win, I care that we aren't a joke, or reviled."

Jimmy let out a sigh and placed a hand on Will's shoulder. "I know Will. I get it, really I do. But the people that will revile you or think it's a joke will do so regardless of how you dance. You're not here to change the minds of bigots - as wonderful as that would be." Jimmy paused. "Look, when I first went to the producers with this idea years ago they shot me down. Did you know that?"

Will shook his head, he'd had no idea Jimmy had a hand in any of this.

"Every year I've put this to them and this year, finally, they agreed. So I need you to do this right Will. I get what you're doing, and why you're doing it. But you need to change it up. I need you to

bring that illusion." He gave a fond smile and squeezed Will's shoulder. "You're not here to change minds, you're here to say fuck 'em."

Will let out a bark of laughter and Jimmy grinned.

"Fuck them all if they can't see two grown men dance under an illusion of romance and not lose their goddamn minds. What you and that charming Count have to do is go out there and put on the romance of your lives and show that it isn't wrong or scary. It's just love."

Will let out a low chuckle and shook his head. "Damn Jimmy, I didn't know you were such a softy."

"Don't be a little shit Will." Jimmy winked and Will chuckled again at one of the sweetest men he had ever known. "You need to evolve, move on from what you're doing. You didn't hear this from me, but you're getting the Argentine Tango next week, the Halloween show. Use it! Break out of that comfort zone. Didn't Francis always push you to do that?"

Will nodded though he had become suddenly numb at the mention of Francis. An onslaught of memories flooding him - having left himself off guard. Jimmy had been close to Francis years back - that's how they had known each other, how he actually got this job.

Jimmy's smile became something comforting and he squeezed Will's shoulder again. "Sorry Will. I… I didn't mean-"

"It's fine Jimmy. You're right, he'd be giving me a tonne of shit right about now." Will choked out the words through a tightening throat, made harder for the truth of them. It had taken Jimmy for him to see it, but of course he was right.

It was time for Will to evolve, he and Hannibal both.

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As Hannibal strolled into the rehearsal studio, he felt light in a way he wasn't sure he ever had before. He racked his brains for whether anyone had ever made him feel like this before, because surely they had. But then he walked into his and Will's rehearsal room and his mind blanked.

It had done pretty much every time he had seen Will for the last month.

It was getting harder to deny that the man was almost everything he thought about.

It had started with the dancing. And Hannibal was slowly admitting to himself that therein lay the root of his original reluctance. As a child he had loved to dance, had loved to express himself and feel through it.

When he was seven his parents and sister died in a car crash that spared him. Dance helped in the recovery from injuries he had sustained. As he grew it helped him deal with the emotion of it - bottling up all his feelings of loss and pain until he processed them only through ballet. Until one day he was almost an adult and it seemed time to put away such things. To move on from the indulgence of that pain and close up the vulnerability he had when he danced. A vulnerability he had started to allow again, expecting to be confronted with the pain he should have dealt with better.

Instead he was confronted by the unexpected instead - the desire to truly allow someone close to him after all these years.

He ignored it at first - thinking it was just a silly reaction to being able to dance publicly with a man like this, to dance at all. And that thought actually warmed him some - thinking of the couples out there who might feel more confident to dance together with spouses and partners after seeing an example on national television. It was a naive thought, he knew, but one he like to visit now and then.

There was something magical about dancing in-sync with a partner. As platonic as Will made their routines, there was something almost sexual in it and Hannibal couldn't help but imagine the other ways in which their bodies might move seamlessly together. He only wished they would do something more on the show - dance less platonically, really show people what it could be for two men to dance together in this way.

He was yet to find a way to express this desire to Will because the more it grew the more tongue tied and less assured he became around the man. His only thought - the next time they might need a glancing touch for this move or that.

After dinners and lunches and wonderful exchanges of banter, memories and interests - Hannibal's mind and body were hungry for Will Graham. He wasn't sure how much longer he could deny it as part of the magic of dance. Now that he'd allowed the man in, he couldn't keep him out.

"Hannibal." Will greeted him brightly, already in and wearing - what seemed - ever increasingly lovely sweats. He was stood at the sound system, queuing up the tune and when he finished and looked up he seemed sheepish. "So… this week, um…"

Will looked utterly delicious as he scrambled for his words. Hannibal had come to enjoy that about him - his mixture of salty self-assurance and humble self-deprecation, wrapped up in a surly armour of rudeness that Hannibal liked to think he was chipping away at here and there.

In lieu of words, Will pressed play and Hannibal couldn't help the spread of a grin and an unexpected loss of control over his eyebrows. He didn't know the exact tune but he certainly knew the dance this sort of music was written for.

"The Argentine Tango?" He licked his lips and swallowed as he waited for a reply, his mind racing to every instance he had ever seen of the dance.

"Yes." Will confirmed, looking a little flushed.

"How… I… I don't think even you can make this dance platonic Will." Hannibal's words were laced with humour and hopefully hid the underlying layer of lust. He cleared his throat and took the moment to get his emotions and desires back in check - settling beneath the surface of his usual facade.

"Quite." Will replied, looking down and rubbing at the back of his neck as he chuckled nervously.

"Which of us will lead?" Hannibal asked. So far they had alternated weekly but it had been almost a moot point considering the routines had been choreographed in such a way as there was never an overt leader or follower.

Will seemed to redden by the moment and he replied whilst looking at his feet. “I… want us to flip during the routine. I have an idea.” As he continued his words restored his confidence and he met Hannibal’s eyes again. “It will be a struggle for dominance. It will be raw. The tango is about the relationship of the dancers - a battle of wills.”

“Do we have a song choice?” Hannibal asked, his face a mask hiding the roiling excitement beneath at the thought of dancing a tango with Will Graham.

“Maneater.” Will chuckled irreverently. “There were only a few Halloween appropriate choices, and it seemed the best. I can work with it choreography wise, and the band are going to mix it up - ‘he’s’ instead of ‘she’s’ and the like. It’s Halloween so we’re going to be dressed as zombies but I think the underlying meaning will be clear.”

“Sexy zombies I hope.” Hannibal grinned. “To complete the illusion of course.”

“Of course.” Will returned his grin and Hannibal felt his pulse racing as he attempted to give absolutely no outward sign of that being the case.

*

For Will it was the most difficult week of rehearsals so far, including that first terrible week. He couldn’t deny he had become fond of Hannibal, and he would like to think he well ignored the attraction he had felt from that day onwards. But they had lunch often and he continued to wonder quite how skilled the man’s hands might be. It was torture.

He had always derived some emotional gain from dance, it’s why he loved it, why all dancers did. But a week of dancing the tango with Hannibal Lecter had Will ready to quit. Day after day of bodies pressed together in a way that was becoming more and more difficult to separate between business and pleasure.

From the second night onwards he went home and jerked off to relieve some of the tension it built in him. It was like they were having sex without either of them reaching climax and Will had never been a fan of edging. He found himself thinking that Hannibal probably was and would delight in what he was doing to Will if he knew.

Not that he would ever tell the man of course.

This would be over soon. They would make it to the end of the season or not. They would go on each other’s Christmas card lists, but that was likely it. Will had no desire for it to be more, despite his deep and painful desire for it to be more.

When the night of the show finally arrived it couldn’t come too soon. A hushed anticipation fell over the audience as Abel announced them and the dance they would be doing.

Perhaps the audience also wondered how in the hell they were going to make the Argentine Tango platonic. Will had a silent chuckle to himself before taking his position out on the stage and waiting for the music. Then out came Hannibal.

They were indeed two very sexy zombies. Makeup was minimal - a hint rather than masking them. They were clearly zombies from the way their almost too tight pants and shirts were ripped and slightly spattered with dirt and blood - a distractingly good look on the Count. When the song

started up there were some chuckles from the audience - as thought this would be a gag - the song choice part of the punchline.

Two male dancers as zombies, maneaters. Yes, probably a little tongue in cheek, that sort of blue humour of yesteryear hinting at a queerness to them at the very most.

Perhaps it was the people who were no doubt thinking that who were the ones that gasped with shock as they began to move together. The raw passion clear. The intent clear. Yes, these men certainly wanted to eat each other.

Will had to keep the grin from his face as he moved. They pressed together, top halves static as their lower halves moved frenetically. They built from La Caminata into a series of ochos. When Hannibal moved through a boleo the little noise there had been from the audience dulled. Will wanted to laugh. They had them! He knew. Audiences only fell silent like that when they were completely rapt.

They moved and pushed, pulled and fought for dominance. Alternating the lead until finally it looked like Will had the upper hand, moving Hannibal into a dip, the Count's beautifully toned leg extending upwards as he did so. Perfect line. Perfect, perfect!

Then they were up again and moving apart before crashing back together. Hannibal anticipating effortlessly as he usually did, a total two way connection for the first time Will could remember.

A lift wasn't necessary in this dance and yet, as they switched again and now Hannibal lead, Will moved at him and was caught, lifted. The audience seemed to take a collective breath and then as the music ended with Hannibal lifting his conquest above him - a hand to the base of his back, Will arching into a perfect curve whilst Hannibal held his ankle - they erupted into a cheer.

They stayed that way for a moment before Hannibal began to gently lower him. The motion slow and torturous, sliding their bodies together until Will was firmly on his feet and Hannibal finally let him go. Will felt flushed, his face red as he welcomed the distraction of Abel coming to greet them.

Will could see Jimmy on his feet cheering and half the audience had joined him by the time they were ushered over to the judges for their comments.

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"Well. Will Graham doesn't do things by halves does he?" Bev said, a slight admonishment there that made Hannibal frown over his coffee at their standing brunch meeting.

"What do you mean?" Hannibal asked, with absolute certainty he knew what she meant.

"Takes you from bromance to X-rated porno in less than a minute." Bev grumbled good heartedly.

"Actually, there were the week of rehearsals first. I'm not quite that easy."

Bev barked a laugh. "Please! Hannibal, I have never seen you this damn light and fluffy in the time I've known you. If you could ever be described as light and fluffy. If Will Graham said the right words I have no doubt you would totally put out."

Hannibal quirked a brow but was too amused to scold her. "Back to the point." He diverted. "You seem to have taken issue with this week's dance. The audience seemed to enjoy it."

“Yeah, the assholes who rang in to complain didn’t feel quite the same way.”

“Those precious darlings, how on earth will they cope? Is there a charitable concern we can donate to for them?” Hannibal mocked.

“May well you joke. But this needs to be handled. Your show is a family friendly show, the dancing show is a family friendly show. You can’t just-”

“Ms Katz.” He cut her off. “If you are going to tell me it was too sexual I will take affront. There was nothing in that dance that would have been considered in anyway inappropriate if danced by a male and female.”

“The moves? Maybe not. With that song choice? Questionable. But Hannibal, I think both you and I know they weren’t complaining about that so much as the way you guys looked like you wanted to fuck right there on the dancefloor.”

Hannibal’s jaw tightened. It wasn’t something he could easily deny and that had left him uncharacteristically lost for words and resultantly annoyed.

“And where is it you’re going with this?” Hannibal asked, knowing Bev well enough to assume there was a point being made.

“I’ve granted an interview on Freddie Lound’s morning show tomorrow. Let’s show the public what a lovely family friendly aristocrat you are. Not some maneating sex beast.” Bev poorly attempted to hide her smirk behind her coffee.

“That sounds like a terrible morning’s work. But I will do my very best to try and convince the detestable woman that I am not a sex beast.”

*

The morning had been hellish, though not in the way Hannibal had assumed it might be. Freddie Lounds was as disagreeable as she came across - questions under the guise of devil’s advocate.

They got the nonsense about complaints out of the way quickly as this was something she was on side with as it turned out. But unfortunately, their conversation didn’t end there.

“Now, Hannibal - I think you might agree with me that people complaining about the content of your latest dance are being oversensitive?” He wasn’t able to reply before she answered for him. “It wasn’t any raunchier than several of the other dances so far this season, and none of them received complaints.”

She barrelled on about the need for acceptance and tolerance in this day and age, before slamming Hannibal with something he should have totally expected -

“So, you and Will Graham. You have caused quite the stir. Is it true that you *are* seeing each other romantically?”

Hannibal was thankful of the years of practiced charm as befitted nobility, enabling him to answer with grace that it wasn’t something he could possibly comment on. A line Bev had given him - no firm denial or agreement. Maintain the illusion.

Ratings, ratings. Family friendly ratings.

Hannibal felt his skin crawling every time Freddie smiled at him.

By the time he got done with her live show - which had resulted in him not so much repairing his reputation as family friendly, as stoking the fires of their possible affair - he was drained.

The only brightness in his day was the thought of getting to the rehearsal studio and seeing Will. They would have their new dance and song for the week now and he was eager to see what Will would do with it now that his design for them seemed to have evolved.

When Hannibal got into the studio he could hear music already playing inside their rehearsal room and so reached a hand up open the door. Then he hesitated.

He recognised the song, but hadn't heard it in years - his curiosity already piqued at what style of dance they would be setting to it. For a 1980s themed week, he could imagine some other contestants had much worse than *Dancing With Tears In My Eyes*. In fact, he quite liked the tune and was already contemplating how much feeling they would need to put into it.

Shadows moved past the slated window in the door and Hannibal knew Will must already be rehearsing, as he wasn't expecting Hannibal to make it from the interview so quickly. Perhaps figuring out the choreography? Hannibal was loathe to disturb the man, especially since it had become abundantly clear to him how much pleasure and peace Will found in dancing. That in truth he found with him too.

So he slipped quietly into the room and... forgot how to breath.

Will was dressed in simple but light, grey sweatpants with a loose dark top that hung off one shoulder. He wore ballet shoes and was dancing completely freely. His back remained to the door as moved gracefully forward and into a perfect *Tour Jeté*.

As he executed the turn of it he saw Hannibal standing, no doubt wide-eyed, next to the door and stopped immediately, dropping back onto his feet.

Hannibal realised he was about to suffocate and sucked in a breath whilst wondering if there was anything in the world more beautiful than Will Graham dancing ballet.

"My apologies, I didn't mean to intrude-" Hannibal started, completely disarmed by Will's look of embarrassment and anger. Hannibal felt like he had just walked in on something very personal.

Will waved away his words, still frowning as he walked to the CD player and stopped the song.

"Just warming up." He clearly lied.

There was something about the fact that was was so blatantly untrue that had Hannibal responding - "It looked like more than that. I… didn't know you knew ballet."

"You never asked. It was never relevant to tell you." Will responded, his back to Hannibal as he changed CDs in the player. His tone hard, like the last few weeks had dissolved.

Hannibal swallowed and studied the man's physique - not for the first time - but this time taking in everything he had missed before. Hidden amongst a frame built from a life of dance - he too had been trained in ballet.

The instant image of them dancing Swan Lake together with Will as Odette and himself as Siegfried flooded his mind and made his blood heat.

“You’re very good.” Hannibal ventured, trying to make up for his intrusion whilst not wanting to let the subject be dismissed. “Perhaps sometime we could-”

“No.” Will cut off and turned to face him. “Okay, let’s get on with this. So that was the song for this week, but first I want us to do some warm ups.” He leaned over and pressed play on a completely different song but with a similar tempo. It wasn’t the first time they had warmed up to a song other than that they wouldn’t be using, but something in Will’s tone made Hannibal wonder if there was more to it.

*

When Will had first been told the song for the week, he wanted to scream.

He didn’t want to ask for another and have to explain why. That felt somehow more torturous, but now he realised that that would likely have been the better option.

Francis would have been mad at him for being brought low by it. It didn’t matter. He just needed to get through the week without falling apart, then things would be back to normal.

Of course, every time the song played it chipped away at him a little more. In the end the Waltz he devised was ridiculously simple for his own sake and he knew they would get criticised and penalised for it. He hated to think this might be the week they would get sent home but it was all he could think to manage. And that was before he had seen Hannibal’s television interview.

He had kept him at arm’s length all week, just going through the motions. How dare he insinuate there was something between them! How dare he speak for Will on that damn show. Another reminder that he should never let anyone close - they would always end up disappointing you. His mind flashed back to Francis.

It had been years! Why couldn’t he get over this?

Easier to avoid it.

It had been easy just to never dance ballet again, never listen to those songs that brought Francis to mind, never think of the pain and hurt that his death had caused. Until now. Years worth of sadness threatened to overwhelm him and the last thing he wanted to be doing was dancing to that damn song with Hannibal Lecter.

Fuck. Francis would have even liked Hannibal - they would have got on ridiculously well. Both weird in their own way, for one. The thought both amused him and filled him with agony.

Hannibal had noticed something was wrong - how could he not. It wasn’t like it took a psychiatrist to figure that much out. But he had thankfully mentioned nothing and Will just wanted to get the hell through it all. As the show drew near he could barely find it in him to do much other than go through the motions and hope it would be enough on the night to keep them in.

*

The entire week had been strange. At first, Hannibal thought it had been his intrusion on Will's private rehearsal that had caused it or the interview with Ms Lounds, but it became clear that it was something deeper. Something he didn't think was his place to ask, and so he continued and tried not to notice the mistakes Will made in their rehearsals - the missed steps, the dropped shoulder.

As they waited for their performance to start Will looked ashen. They stood offset, waiting to be called forward, and Hannibal thought for a moment Will might vomit. He was about to ask when they were announced and Will pulled on a barely there smile and moved to his position. Hannibal had no choice but to follow suit.

They went through the motions of the performance, Hannibal found himself trying to compensate for the parts Will was fluffing. More than once he heard a reaction from the judges, though he was sure Will didn't at all - he seemed to be on another planet.

It should have been beautiful - the two of them gliding effortlessly along to a slowed version of the Ultravox song. They both wore black pants, white shirts and sparkly gold suspenders - relatively plain in order to put the focus on the dance. That was perhaps a mistake, as Will set them on the wrong foot, moved them into the wrong turn.

The sympathetic sounds from the audience made Hannibal ache despite their valiant and encouraging cheer when they finally came to an end.

Despite how they tried to smile through, he was sure Will knew as well as he did - this was their last dance.

Chapter End Notes

references for Will and Hannibal's Halloween tango - here and here

Become

Chapter Summary

A reunion, Happy Holidays and a fantastic New Year!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I think it’s a terrible idea Beverly.” Hannibal said as he chopped the onion.

“Noooo, it’s a great idea.” She encouraged over the tinny speaker phone, echoing around Hannibal’s spacious kitchen. “Aside from the fact that it would be a great way to capitalise on the popularity of your time on the show, you… You miss him Hannibal.”

He stopped chopping.

He did. He had seen Will Graham every day for weeks and then nothing. Their scores that last week were terrible, and they were up against a very popular sportstar in the dance off, the public vote was closer than he had presumed it might be, but in the end they were eliminated. And perhaps rightly, based on that routine.

After they said a stilted goodbye that night he hadn’t heard from Will again. He had text a few times but had no reply, and was not about to intrude any more on the man’s life than he already had.

It didn’t help that the short few weeks had been filled with more gossip and rumour in the tabloids that couldn’t be further from the truth. He only wished they were doing half the things that they gossip columns suggested. Or even one of the things. Just seeing each other would have been something. But instead he had felt the cold burn of rejection - and yet he found himself unable to regret having finally let someone close. Having let Will close.

The only thing he did regret was hurting Will. Hannibal wasn’t sure what it was that had happened exactly, but something he had said or done had upset Will and set him on that downward spiral that lost them the show.

“I don’t think he would do it-”

“I already talked to his agent. Will’s in, we’re just sorting out the details. Like me running it past you.” Bev spoke quickly.

“And if I say no?” He grumbled.

“You can’t. It’s a done deal. Look, he agreed so he must want to see you. And think of the ratings.” Bev near whined - like a small child wanting her way.

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh. His Christmas special of Dining with the Count was always his highest rated episode. They would be filming in a week ready for it to be edited and air over

Christmas. Late November and they would have all the trimmings set up in his home - where they always filmed it rather than the studio. A personal invitation into his home every Christmas to every viewer and that year's special guest.

"Just think about it - everyone loved you and Will together, they are going to go nuts for the pair of you cooking a Christmas feast together. And you'll have a lot more chemistry than last year's guest I'm sure." She scoffed, and Hannibal shuddered. Brian Zeller - a fellow not quite as charming as he believed, with his own science show - had been a rather awful experience. They had no chemistry and had only met a few times before hand at various award dinners and such - during which Hannibal had taken a firm disliking to him and his ridiculous chatter. The thought of having that experience with Will instead filled him with an eager joy that he didn't want to acknowledge.

"Fine. Will Graham it is then." He huffed, feeling a tremble rung through him. He was caught between a desperate longing to see Will again, and a nervous anxiety at the thought of the same.

*

Will was still mad that this got arranged behind his back, but wanted to believe that Hannibal had no hand in that. It seemed more likely that his agent Margot had been all too ready to accept the offer. She seemed to get a little crazy around this time of year - bringing his television career out of annual moth balls and trying to capitalise on any popularity he garnered.

Will just wanted to dance. He didn't much care about his popularity, he just hoped they'd keep him on every year. He had only even gotten into the show because of Jimmy. They were recruiting backing dancers and he knew Jimmy through Francis. Jimmy knew how tough things were after Francis was gone, he was too sweet a guy to let Will fall into a hole of grief.

He couldn't knock the show. They had been good to him and it was fun and consistent work, even if there was part of him that still felt unfulfilled by it. Not that that had every played on him much until he met Hannibal. Until there was something more in his life - a fulfilment he wasn't expecting.

Will shook that thought from his mind. It was always too painful to go there. Every time he allowed himself it felt like he was indulging a pain he needed to close the door on. Every time he allowed himself, it fucked him up - like when they got given that damn song and he let himself slip into the pain of it until he was useless. Until he lost them their spot on the show.

The guilt of that weighed heavy on him as he stepped out of the taxi and walked up to the house that *had* to belong to Hannibal Lecter. He knocked on the door and waited, unsure of what to say. He had ignored Hannibal's attempts to reach out to him, left the man thinking whatever had happened was his fault. All because he didn't want to explain. Because that meant opening the door to that pain, and the last thing he wanted to do was do that with someone else.

The door opened and Hannibal looked both slightly surprised and absolutely delighted to see him. It made his stomach rise and fall at once. Damn, he really did like Hannibal - that was what made everything so much harder. It was hard to deny, even to himself, the connection they had forged and how deep his feelings for the man were.

"Will, a pleasant and welcome surprise. I wasn't expecting you until tomorrow." Hannibal stepped back and motioned for Will to come in.

The house was just about as grand as he thought it could be, though maybe not as much as he had expected. For the money the man had he could afford a mansion in extensive grounds, so a fancy townhouse - really damn fancy - seemed pretty humble.

Will swallowed as he stepped in and looked around the foyer, rubbing at the back of his neck and feeling it burn there with a blush threatening to creep over his face.

“Yeah, sorry. I shouldn’t have… I should have called or… Is this a good time?” Will babbled, not meeting Hannibal’s eyes.

“Of course. You’re always welcome Will. My door is always open to friends.” Hannibal replied in a tone that started as a platitude and turned to something more genuine. “I was just about to start preparing dinner. I can cook for two if you’d care to join me?”

Will nodded and allowed Hannibal to take his coat. He really still had no idea what to say, he just knew he didn’t want the first time they’d see each other again to be when they had to film the Christmas Special the next day. He owed Hannibal more than that.

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Hannibal left Will in the study and moved back to the kitchen, fiddling with his apron as he went and then leaning heavily on the counter once he got there.

He let out a shaky breath.

He hadn’t realised until that moment, quite how much he had been mentally preparing himself for seeing Will again. Not just that. No, with Will arriving like this it was so much harder to continue to convince himself he could accept Will cutting him out of his life. How devastating it had been when Will had cut contact with him after how close they had become. When he heard movement and realised Will had followed him into the kitchen, he found he wasn’t able to try for any kind of pretence. He just didn’t have it in him.

“Hannibal?” The word was laced with concern.

“I let you in. I let you know me.” He choked out the word.

“Fuck.” Will cursed softly and Hannibal felt him close behind him. “Hannibal, I’m sorry. I never meant to… I didn’t… I’m sorry I lost us the show.”

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh and turned to see the tumultuous expression Will wore. “I don’t care about the show Will. I care that you never spoke to me. Never let me apologise for whatever it was that I said or-”

“You didn’t do anything Hannibal.” Will answered softly. “It was… a bad week. I’m sorry I shut you out. It’s what I do.”

“You don’t owe me anything Will. We were thrown together in this, we’re not-” *lovers* “-friends. Just colleagues of a sort. I’m the one acting inappropriately. I… I will admit, I developed feelings for you, I wanted to know you better. But that is my burden not yours. You have no obligation to my feelings. I can only apolog-”

“Stop, Hannibal. I…” Will pleaded. They stood so close now that he could see the heave of Will’s chest as he breathed through his frustration.

“Will, please. This is a storm in a teacup that we are on the verge of blowing out of proportion-”

“You wanted to be seen.” Will cut in again. A statement not a question.

“By you.” Hannibal agreed after a few beats.

“I wanted to be seen too… I…” Will seemed to be struggling with his words and emotions. Hannibal wasn’t unaware that he had been kept at arm’s length despite the spark he was sure he felt beneath it all. “I was mad at you.”

Hannibal swallowed and waited for Will to continue.

“But it wasn’t your fault. The interview with Freddie, I… hated that you insinuated there was something between us. You didn’t have the right to do that. But I get it. I get why you did. It’s all part of that game we had to play. It felt false and devalued what I thought we had developed…” He shrugged. “It was bad timing... with that song… with…” Will’s words ended with a quaver and Hannibal found himself reaching out, placing a comforting hand on his arm.

Will shuddered when he did so and seemed for a moment like he might pull away, but didn’t.

“Will. I… When I was a child I lost my family to an accident and dance was one way I coped with the emotions that I had no capacity to process.” It was strange to be saying this now, after all the times he had wanted and almost told Will in the past. “I left it all behind and closed myself off. I have a string of failed flings because I was unable to give that part of myself to someone - unable to open it up again. But for you… with you… Dancing with you freed me from it, made me realise that I could now deal with that loss and not let it overshadow any connections I might have with anyone in future. That I could let someone close and take the risk of being hurt. That I could let you close.”

Hannibal took a deep breath after his confession, Will’s eyes finding his. He could see the struggle there and the similarity too. Will had lost someone, was protecting himself from something, some pain.

“What happened Will? What has made you so guarded?” He pushed, it felt like he had to - it was now or never.

Will’s jaw tightened and Hannibal knew he may have overstepped, but didn’t care. He may have shared from his own past, that didn’t mean he should have an expectation of the same, but this felt like the last chance to resolve this.

“I lost someone. A friend.” Will admitted. “My mentor.”

“You don’t have to tell me Will. I hope you might, I hope you would share and perhaps lighten the load you bear, but I understand if-” His words were cut short as Will sagged against him and breathed heavily, clearly trying to control his emotions as little as he could now.

Hannibal stilled for a moment before letting his arms circle Will. He closed his eyes and breathed deep the man’s scent. They had held each other before in dancing, never like this, and yet it felt so right.

“Francis Dolarhyde, he taught me ballet.” Will started quickly, as though trying to get the words out before losing his nerve. “That was how I started. He was my world, like family to me after mine disowned me.” He shook for a moment and Hannibal held him tighter. “Fuck… I never, I’ve never talked about any of this…”

“You can talk about it now Will, I’m here for you.”

Will suddenly pulled back, looking embarrassed. Even so he continued, looking down at the counter as Hannibal let his arms drop. Even so, he didn’t hesitate as he finally opened up.

“My parents kicked me out, when I was a kid. I was seventeen. I’d had a thing with a guy on the football team for a while - he maintained he wasn’t gay. To me he said he was just curious and I never pushed. When we got caught kissing beneath the bleachers, he said I’d practically attacked him. Fed into that small town mentality of predatory gays, even at seventeen and half the guy’s size.” His tone grew angrier and more twangy as he spoke, then he shook it off. “Anyways. I moved to the city, tried to make ends meet without becoming a hooker.” He chuckled, and yet Hannibal was sure he wasn’t at all joking. “I found a place to live with some ok, if stoned, people. I waited tables, fixed cars. Whatever to make the rent. The one thing I had for myself was dancing. I’d loved it at school. It was something I needed to do to make life bearable. I went to a local community centre where they offered discounted lessons. I started ballet. I mean, I had never learned when I was younger, I was never going to get to the level others could but I just loved it. I was able to express everything without saying a word.

“The teacher was Francis. A little older than me. He had inherited from his grandmother and was rolling in it, gave the social conscious lessons exactly for that reason. He actually gave a shit. Felt like he was the first person in my life who ever had. We became friends. He became my mentor. And after about a year, I moved in with him.”

Hannibal found himself freezing at that, concerned at the turns this story could take. He wanted to reach out again but was very conscious that Will had put this distance between them to tell the story.

Will took a deep breath and let it out with a shudder before continuing. His eyes glanced quickly at Hannibal and then away again. “I knew what people thought. That I was his fuck boy or some shit, but it… I never. It was never like that. He needed a friend as much as I did. He was like a brother to me. He’d grown up totally closeted because of his abusive grandmother. He’d had it rough too. We bonded over it. And after a few months of living there I was able to get on my feet.

“He taught me everything he could about ballet, about all other kinds of dance he knew. He introduced me to the right people and before I knew it I was taking more classes, I was working regularly as a dancer. He changed my life. I moved into my own place but we stayed close. Danced every week. He was working on something… a ballet. I would rehearse with him, taking the female role, and he would joke that we should just do this - perform as a same sex pairing. It was a modern piece - sort of. It was about family and loss and a whole lot of Francis. To that damn song.”

Will sucked in a breath and Hannibal noticed him ball his fists. “He didn’t finish it. That fucking house - the one he inherited from his grandmother. He’d been restoring it, putting in a private studio but the wiring was… There was a fire. He didn’t make it.”

“I’m sorry Will.” Hannibal replied sincerely, still not sure whether to reach out, considering Will had pulled away.

Will shook his head. “It was years ago now. Jimmy - Jimmy Price? I knew him through Francis, just a little. He got me a slot on the show as a backing dancer whilst I started to make a name for myself in professional circles, compete in ballroom. Three years ago I became one of the professionals on the show. I’ve just been throwing myself into work for years. I didn’t… I didn’t want to lose anyone again. No one was ever worth that risk of opening up to only to lose them. Until I met you.” He looked at Hannibal. “And I wanted to let you in, but it… It was easier to push you away than deal with it all.”

“I can imagine that the press speculation about us may have made it very uncomfortable for you.” Hannibal frowned and was surprised when Will let out a low chuckle.

“Yeah, I guess. Though in some ways I sort of enjoyed it. The thought that they could be right was… nice.”

They shared a smile and Hannibal continued to resist the urge to reach for him.

He cleared his throat. “I understand something of loss. As I said, for many years I have kept people at arm’s reach, married to my work to avoid the risk of experiencing that loss again.”

“Fuck. Hannibal I…” Will shook his head. “I should have… I never took your feelings into account. I was too focused on... Francis was the only person I ever told about my family until today. When he died it felt like… When I met you, when we started to get closer I wanted nothing more than to push you away. I didn’t want to connect with someone again just to have them leave or reject me. And all the while I think I knew that you would understand that - that maybe you had a similar pain. But I was just too chickenshit. Too used to living that way.”

“I would never reject you Will. Never leave you.” Hannibal found the words falling quickly from his mouth and wanted to eat them when he saw Will’s jaw tighten in response. “I’m sorry… I shouldn’t have…”

Will let out another low chuckle and shook his head. “We’re a pair of fools. Too fucking scared to live our lives.” He took in a deep breath and then let it out in a quick puff. “I wanted to be seen by you Hannibal, I’m sorry it took me so long to do something about it.”

Hannibal’s lips tweaked into a smile. “Better late than never.” He swallowed, those butterflies he so often felt around Will, working up a storm in his belly. “If… If it makes a difference, I’m not the leaving kind. Pretty dedicated and loyal, like an old dog.”

Will laughed. “I actually do have a soft spot for hapless old dogs.”

*

It had felt good to explain everything to Hannibal. Will was a private person with a ingrained dislike for therapy, but now he was finally feeling a weight lift from the simple act of sharing his past. It didn’t hold the power over him it once had. Now he reflected on the bigoted actions of his family, he saw them as just that. And not something wrong with him.

Will had sat at the breakfast bar in the kitchen as Hannibal cooked a simple pasta dish - apparently. By simple, Hannibal meant secretly gourmet. It was one of the best things Will had ever tasted and Hannibal had laughed when Will had been unable to restrain himself from blurting - “Damn, you really can cook!”

After they ate at the kitchen bar, they relocated to the study and finished the bottle of wine Hannibal had opened to pair with the meal. Will relaxed back into the comfortable sofa as Hannibal took the armchair facing him.

He was all soft and sleepy and they talked more than Will was sure he had to anyone else in the last year in total. They laughed. Will felt light and excited about the prospect of their filming the next day. Hannibal had explained the crew would be arriving early to set up for filming in the kitchen and part of the walkthrough to the dining room.

“I need to call a taxi back to my hotel soon. I just… How do you want to play it?” Will asked.

Hannibal frowned. “Play it? Um… I thought, maybe… if you would be willing, I’d like to take you on a date? Perhaps dinner and-”

Will laughed and felt the colour rise in his cheeks. “That sounds… Yeah, I’d like that. But I meant tomorrow for the filming. How are we going to be in front of the cameras? I’ve never had to really talk much on screen. And… I guess I’m conscious of the fact that I want on our screen chemistry to be more Halloween week, not week one of the show.”

Hannibal blushed then too and Will felt an ache from his chest down to his groin at the sight. “Yes, that’s understandable. Are you suggesting we perform the tango?”

Will laughed and shared Hannibal’s teasing grin. “I think I’d quite like to tango with you Doctor Lecter.” He drawled.

“Doctor now? Not glorified cook?”

Will groaned. “Will you ever forgive my rudeness? If we’re going to… um…. date, I think you might need to get used to it.”

“I quite enjoy it actually. Being a head chef, a Count and once a doctor - I do not brook rudeness. And yet… I find from you it is… tantalising.”

He felt like Hannibal’s eyes were boring into him and he really wished they were sitting on the small couch together.

“I find you tantalising.” Will admitted in a low rumble, not losing Hannibal’s eyes.

“Will…” Hannibal whispered his name like a prayer and then followed it quickly with. “Stay?”

*

Hannibal had not intended this from the outset of the evening, it had not even been a motive of seeing Will again. If anything it would have been beyond the reach of his hopes much less his expectations.

And yet, Will Graham was naked in his bed.

Will’s beautiful form was pressed against him and Hannibal felt consumed.

Something had opened up. They had cracked each other’s armour and spilled themselves between until they had no choice but to allow it. And Hannibal wanted nothing more than to allow it.

They had finished their wine and stood up, reaching for each other immediately until they met in a crushing and sweet tasting kiss. Will had asked the way to the bedroom and they had gone, discarding clothes as they went. Until now he was beneath Will and arching against the hardness pressed to his thigh.

“What do you want Hannibal?” Will growled against his ear. “How do you-”

“I want you Will. I think there is a distinct chance that I might lose my mind if we don’t-”

“Hannibal.” Will nuzzled at his neck as he growled again, a deep rumble. “Are you asking me to fuck you?”

“Yes.” Hannibal breathed the word and Will groaned against him.

He was still kissing against Hannibal’s neck and throat as his hands moved in slow motions down Hannibal’s sides and he kissed the words against his skin - “Lube, condoms?”

Hannibal nodded and moved up, Will moving with him as though in a dance - his lips never losing contact as he explored Hannibal’s skin. The sensation was wonderful. He’d had flings in the past, a short and ill-fated relationship with a colleague before he quit medicine, and sex had often been perfunctory. This already felt so different and he had been honest when he said he thought he might lose his mind. He moved from under Will and went to the dresser.

As he got back to the bed Will pulled him down, claiming him with a deep kiss as they sank into the bed together, facing each other as they landed on their sides. Will’s hands cupped his face and he breathed heavily against Hannibal’s mouth as Hannibal opened the condom wrapper and began rolling it onto Will. Will’s kiss landed then and became hungrier as Hannibal’s hand worked him. Hannibal savoured the reaction he caused and then went gladly as Will pushed him back. He rolled onto his back, Will moving next to him, over him, as he fumbled the lube between their hands. Minutes passed of unsure hand placements and half interrupted kisses until finally a slicked finger pressed against him.

“I am going to lose my mind.” Hannibal suddenly blurted and then groaned as Will circled lube around his hole.

Will chuckled and began to nuzzle at his neck once more, sucking deep marks there that made Hannibal shudder, as his fingers continued.

It was a slow and pleasurable dance that Will’s fingers made as they delicately entered him, spread and stretched him, sought that innermost point of pleasure within him.

Hannibal grunted and arched off the bed when Will grazed his prostate. His fingers seemed suddenly teasing, not nearly enough of the man.

“Please Will…” He breathed, unsure how much longer he could possibly last. He was overwhelmed by sensation - the movement of the fingers, the press of Will’s hardness against his thigh, his own cock bobbing as it sought non existent friction, and the rough burn of Will’s beard against his increasingly tender throat.

There was no chuckle now, only lust blown eyes taking him in as Will moved between his legs, lubing his sheathed cock before lining up and slowly moving forward.

Hannibal relaxed into the push, wanting nothing more than to tense around Will but holding back for more. And Will gave it to him, feeding each inch in a slow and intense stretch as he buried himself to the hilt.

“Fuck!” Will grunted, holding himself on shaky arms either side of Hannibal, as he remained that way for a moment. “You feel so good.” His lips found Hannibal’s neck again as his hips began a slow movement. Unhurried, seeking nothing but pleasure for either of them and guided entirely by the involuntary sounds Hannibal made. His thrusts were long and slow, leaving Hannibal feeling exquisitely full with each movement.

He should have known Will would be a magnificent lover from how they danced together. From that tango… The thought of it made his cock throb and strain between their bellies. And that spurred him into action. A quicker pace as he reached between them and took Hannibal in hand.

“I think I’ve wanted to do this for a while.” Will admitted, his face radiating bliss as he moved them steadily towards their shared pleasure.

“Yes.” Hannibal admitted. Wanting to say more but completely unable to formulate anything reasonable in the English language, and possibly in his native Lithuanian, as Will made love to him.

Their bodies rocked together, sticky with sweat, as Will picked up speed. His hips moving against Hannibal, cock filling him so wonderfully that Hannibal could do little more than give himself over to the pleasure. His head lolled back as Will thrust harder and deeper, keeping up the pace with his hand. He could feel his orgasm building throughout his entire body, ready to break.

“I’m close…” Will growled against his throat. And that was all it took for Hannibal to tense up and spill between them. A shock of pleasure running through him and leaving him tingling down to his toes. Made all the more intense by Will’s continued and not desperate thrusts. Hannibal continued to crest along the heights of his climax as Will chased his own end. Then Will stiffened, his body shuddering through a couple more erratic thrusts before he spilled inside Hannibal.

It was intense, and they both trembled as they started to come down from the high they had brought each other.

“Stay.” Hannibal implored breathlessly, wondering if Will might still plan to go back to his hotel and feeling so desperately that he never wanted to let the man out of sight ever again.

Will grinned down at him and then collapsed into the crook of his neck, where he mumbled against the sweaty skin - “Only if you make me breakfast.”

*

It was weird having the house occupied after it had been their private den of sensuality for the last few, long hours.

Will wasn’t sure when he’d had such satisfying sex before. Actually he was - never. He’d not really seen anyone seriously in a long time. Dancing had taken up such a large part of his life, which he would not change for the world. Half of his sexual experiences had been one night stands and fumbled quickies. It had only ever been about getting off, never about a connection. And damn, was there a connection. As they had made love it felt like they were conjoined - blurring into one another until he wasn’t sure where he ended and Hannibal began. He had been happy to spend

several hours after exploring and tasting Hannibal - and allowing the same in return. He wasn't even sure how he'd make it through the day.

He thought he might be embarrassed when the crew arrived to find him already here. Or when he called Margot and asked her to bring his stuff from the hotel so he could get changed. But he didn't. He couldn't feel even a little bit of shame or embarrassment over spending the night with Hannibal Lecter.

Will showered and got changed as Margot snooped around the kitchen. She had already admitted immediately on arrival that she loved Hannibal's show and would love to eat at one of his restaurants some time. He had promised to arrange a meal for them all with his restaurant manager Alana for in the New Year.

Will had left them chattering away and returned refreshed to find Hannibal alone in the kitchen. Some crew ambling around setting up a few last items, he moved quickly and quietly behind Hannibal until he pressed himself tight against the man. Hannibal immediately sank back into him and turned his head to steal a quick kiss before Will grinned and asked again - "How do you want to play this?"

"I'll follow your lead Will." Hannibal deferred, but the heat in his eyes was enough to send a jolt of electric through Will.

An hour later the cameras were rolling and they were preparing the dinner comfortably together, chatting about their time dancing together in the relaxed interview style of Hannibal's show, and… stealing adoring glances.

It had started with Hannibal introducing Will by saying he needed no introduction and that he planned to teach Will to cook as Will had taught him how to dance. He had followed it with a very straight faced -

"If Will is amenable to learning such things from a glorified cook."

Oh. It's going to be like that?

Will just grinned and nodded as he reproached - "well I guess you'll never let me forget that will you. One to tell the grandkids I guess." Will joked, laughing as Hannibal seemed momentarily caught off guard by it. Which he could understand, because he was too - by the feeling of how enjoyable the idea of them settling down together was.

They continued to bicker good naturedly, and Will noticed the stifled chuckle here and there from the crew. He only noticed because he largely forgot they were there until the quiet laughter reminded him. It was so easy to get lost in this with Hannibal and he wondered if he had made Hannibal feel the same when they danced together.

It did bring dancing back to mind though and he mentioned the show again, Hannibal used it as an in to ask him some questions that an interviewer might about his background and training. When Will gave his usual brief response about ballet he stopped. It didn't feel as heavy as usual but also it sparked something new that wasn't there before. A curiosity.

"You learned ballet." Will remembered aloud. "In fact, I'm pretty sure you had more training than me. Perhaps you could show me a thing or two." Will jibed playfully and Hannibal's ever so slight blush and even slighter glint of interest wasn't lost on him.

Will found himself wondering in amusement whether it was better or worse that they had slept together the night before. What might have been construed as innuendo seemed almost a direct reference, and the urge to reach out and touch Hannibal as they cooked side by side was so very tempting. He had never had this sort of domesticity before, as false as it was - he had to keep reminding himself - and he liked it.

Hannibal cleared his throat and then responded - “perhaps when the goose is in the oven we can take a minute for a lesson.”

It was Will’s turn to hide quite how much the suggestion flustered him. And true to his word once the goose was in the oven Hannibal did not remove the cooked one that had been prepared earlier, but turned to Will with an appraising gaze.

“Perhaps something simple?”

Will chuckled but allowed himself to be positioned next to the counter, noting that two of the cameras backed up slightly to take in the unplanned wide-shot.

“I’m hardly wearing the shoes for it.” Hannibal apologised as he moved to the small music system in the corner of the kitchen and set it on - Tchaikovsky filling the room like air.

Will had to chuckle and shake his head at the man in a button down, vest and crisp white apron about to dance ballet with him in the middle of his cookery show. Not that he cared one little bit - the thought of being held by Hannibal, even if in a dance - sparked a desire through him.

“No. Hardly.” There were more titters from the crew but Hannibal didn’t seem to notice as he focused intently on Will.

Hannibal quirked a brow at him. “When you are ready Will?” He prompted.

Will began, moving with the grace and agility he capitalised on in all his dancing but was seen to best effect this way. He could see Hannibal’s own delicate movements from the corner of his eye before they came together into a hold and then a lift. Hannibal held him for a moment and then slowly lowered him back down so that their bodies connected at every possible point on the descent. Will found himself panting despite not being remotely out of breath.

Their eyes fixed on each other as the crew actually broke into a cheer at their successful demonstration.

Even so, neither of them noticed for a long moment and it was another moment again before they separated.

*

“Hannibal. Oh my… Just…” Ms Katz babbled at him incoherently - the first time he had ever seen her lost for words.

They were taking a short break whilst powder was reapplied to their faces and various items in the kitchen moved around. He was about to ask her to clarify when he noticed much the same look across the room on Margot Verger’s face as she chatted animatedly at Will.

“This is… just… wow.”

Hannibal quirked a brow. “Is there something that needs refilming?”

He was very aware that the crew never normally interacted in his shows, and yet, over the course of the filming they had become more raucous - laughing, cheering, even some good natured heckling. Will took it with a good cheer that seemed to encourage them and Hannibal had to admit he enjoyed the change in the format. It felt a lot less stuffy and stoic than usual.

Which, when she was finally able to speak, was apparently Bev’s point. Along with such tips as “keep it up.” And “Not too *up* though! You guys are practically having sex in front of the camera as it is.”

Hannibal had been unsure how to respond to that and the mortification he might have felt was soothed by the warm feeling it spread inside him instead. It wasn’t put on, and it wasn’t something he could help - unless of course they asked Will to leave and heaven forbid gave him different guest. Which, he felt, would be a travesty. He might be biased, but Will was a darn sight more watchable than most of his previous guests put together.

They continued preparing the cheese course once filming commenced, their flirting becoming ever more prevalent, but thankfully still within the realms of good taste.

Hannibal found himself wondering at the children who might watch the show and ask their parents why those two men seemed so sweet on each other. He enjoyed the thought of the parents having to explain. Because that had been part of the whole point hadn’t it? A normal portrayal of normal men who happened to be gay, doing normal things. And falling in love?

Perhaps the last bit was only, as ever on the show, intended as an illusion. But things didn’t always work out that way.

When the cheese course of the meal was complete, Will tasted it and groaned his appreciation. *Pomegranate Chévre*, Hannibal took an unexpected and immeasurable amount of pleasure in Will’s enjoyment of his food.

“In Greek mythology the pomegranate is beautiful and tempting but full of the seeds of retribution.” Hannibal found himself saying, mesmerised by Will’s delight - beautiful and tempting, though he hoped the retribution was behind them.

Will chuckled lightly. “Sounds dramatic.” He helped himself to more. “Do you usually make this at Christmas?”

“Most years. I could make it this year if you care to join me?” Hannibal spoke casually as he cleared some of the plates. Only realising what he had said and where he had said it when several members of the crew let out small gasps. “I… I mean…”

Will grinned at him and nodded. “I’d love to join you for Christmas.”

*

Will was pretty sure this had been their best date yet, despite the fact that they had still yet to actually go on a date. But even with the small audience, he had been consumed by Hannibal for much of it.

Enraptured even before they danced again and, damn he'd missed that. He'd never missed a dance partner from the show before, but that reminder of what it felt to have Hannibal pressed close to him… he shuddered.

And then jumped when Margot suddenly appeared next to him with a chipper "Will! Good news!"

"Hmm?"

He turned and frowned at her, having to pull his eyes from watching Hannibal helping direct the crew in clearing the kitchen - *his* kitchen - to his satisfaction. He wanted nothing more than to drag him back upstairs and was certain that feeling wasn't going to wear off any time soon.

What was this? He wasn't sure, he just knew he wanted more of it until there was a reason to stop. And he was pretty sure there never would be one.

"Will!" Margot chirped again, this time nudging him. "Can I just get your attention for one moment? I said, good news!"

Will dragged his attention to Margot even though he could still see Hannibal pottering out of the corner of his eye. And more importantly the crew starting to remove the filming equipment they seemed to have spent forever packing.

"Good news?"

I just talked to Jack, they want you and Hannibal on the New Year Special.

"Huh?" That suddenly had his attention. The special aired the week after the final and was competition between past contestants. Usually from previous years.

"They were going to have the orchestra play whilst the scores are tallied, with some feature dancers. Well, when he saw the impromptu ballet today he sent it to the exec and they really want you and Hannibal to do that spot during the show. Filming is in a three weeks, and they are thinking Swan Lake." Margot spoke in her usual manner of calm barely covering excitement. A cheeky smile topping it off.

"What?" Will blinked, entirely and bafflingly confused. "When did Jack see the… this episode doesn't air until Christmas Day." It wasn't live - there was no way Jack had seen them dance ballet.

"I sent him what I filmed on my phone." She said quickly whilst waving a dismissive hand. "Think of the lead in! The audience will already be completely in love with the pair of you - even more so - once this airs. Then bam! Hit them with ads for the New Year show - must watch television as Will Graham and Count Hannibal Lecter dance together once more."

He wanted to be mad at her, and likely would have been any other time or place. As it was he looked back to Hannibal, studied him moving gracefully through the kitchen - practically dancing around the crew - his body built to dance with Will's.

"A ballet?" Will asked, not looking away from Hannibal. The man's eyes met his and the resulting smile spread through Will like a wildfire.

"Yeah, something wintery and dramatic and… sexy." He didn't have to look back to her to see Margot was waggling her eyebrows.

“If Hannibal’s in, I’m in.” Will grinned, the room around him faded out to nothing but Hannibal Lecter.

*

”The world of celebrity is abuzz with the news of the return of Hannibal Lecter and his dance partner Will Graham, to the Dancing With The Stars New Year Special! Join us after the break when our own Freddie Lounds will be chatting with Frederick Chilton and Jimmy Price - judges from the show” ... “Reports of boycotts of the New Year show for once more featuring a same sex, and rumoured romantic pairing, have been met with backlash on social media. Judge Bedelia Du Maurier hit back at several tweets, calling them bigoted and providing links to the articles and information on the queer history of dance.” ... “Are audiences divided Abel?” “I don’t think so, Reba. I think the few and unfortunate people that didn’t like it have already stopped watching and I’m sure I can speak for the entire studio when I say they won’t be missed.” “And are you looking forward to it?” “Are you kidding? After the Dining With The Count Christmas Special practically illustrated in technicolour the phrase if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen - I’m looking forward to seeing these beautiful men back on the dancefloor!” ... “Dancing With The Stars has created the Must Watch show of the year, tune in tomorrow at Eight, for fun, frolics and of course, the long awaited reunion of this season’s favourite couple.”

*

“We must try and keep this professional Will.” Hannibal muttered against his cheek as they stood close. Weeks of barely having left various bedrooms other than to rehearse had redefined what Will might call professionalism. It had been hard enough keeping themselves off each other long enough to get into costume and make up. And that hadn’t made things any easier - Hannibal was ridiculously enticing as Siegfried, looking every inch the nobility that he was.

“Of course.” Will agreed, already wanting to rip the man’s clothes off as soon as remotely possible, trying not to ruffle his feathers too much as he drew as close to Hannibal as their costumes would allow.

“And now.” Abel’s voice rang out. “Whilst the votes are counted for the winners of this year’s New Year Trophy, please enjoy Swan Lake…”

The audience was louder than Will had ever heard them. Gracefully running onto the stage, punctuated with a jump and drop, he waited for Hannibal to make his entrance and take his position front and centre. A hushed energy fell over the studio audience as, backed with the winter backdrop, Will and Hannibal began their 4 minute segment of Matthew Bourne’s production, and the first meeting between the Prince and the White Swan.

Reherals had been intense but they were nothing compared to his as the Swan drew the Prince out of himself, offering him love and acceptance as their bodies came together - gracefully erratic at first - in a series of lifts and turns. Until finally - finally - they were moving in sync. Two souls finding each other, pressing together and becoming conjoined. Becoming something more.

Will forgot time and place and audience and anything and everything else other than his Prince as they moved effortlessly together. Like they were always supposed to move together. His imagination took a leap ahead of him - beyond the next move, beyond the show and the new year ahead of them. Beyond all of that to them, together - more of Hannibal’s shows together. More dancing. A future together. A life more fulfilled by the presence of the other.

It was beautiful.

They exited to an eruption of cheers, Hannibal's Prince hot on the trail of his desire - Will's Swan.

Off stage, deafened by the sound from the audience, they came to a stop, panting as they leaned into each other. Holding each other together and away at the same moment. It only took one glance to see that hunger in Hannibal's eyes and know it was the same as in his own.

Will found himself start to chuckle and then laugh harder as he voiced his realisation - "Hannibal, I don't think we can ever dance together in public again. At least on family friendly shows."

Hannibal returned a mischievous grin.

Huge thanks to beatricenius for this amazing art! Check it out on Tumblr. And you can also find them on Twitter

beatricenius

Chapter End Notes

This is the dance Will and Hannibal do on the New Year special.

If you don't know the song - here is Dancing With Tears In My Eyes

Thanks for reading this guys, and for the wonderful kudos and comments. They have kept my going through a pretty rough few days, so I really appreciate that! I promise I will get to replying to the comments soon! I am almost 300 comments behind on replying right now but will try to catch up soon. I always appreciate everything you say, just sometimes writing gets in the way of replying. I need to get a better balance <3

Epilogue ~Swan

Chapter Summary

Recipes. Lots and lots of recipes. For swan.

I'm migrating everything from my Tumblr account, it was originally posted there for #HappilyEverAfter

“Damn Hannibal… How many recipe books do you own?” Will had been to the office, come library in Hannibal’s house many times. They’d romped on the desk more than once, but he had never really taken in how vast the contents really were until they were now packing them into boxes. Hannibal was on the upper level, a little walkway around the top of the book shelves that stretched to the ceiling. They had to start somewhere, and this was the last room to pack.

“My own or by other people?” He asked, completely serious and with no humility.

Will chuckled.

“These here-” Hannibal indicated the shelves he stood in front of - packed with thick notebooks as far as Will could tell, “-are mine. Mostly hand written. Some experiments, some I refined and published in my cookery books. Some old family recipes.” He smiled, running a finger down a spine in his reminiscing.

Will nodded and returned the smile. He better understood now why Hannibal had refused to let the movers touch this room… and his kitchen of course.

After two years living between this house and Will’s apartment, they were moving in together. Their own place with a library similar to this - already remodelled at Hannibal’s instruction - waiting for these books. Will had thought he was just being precious. But… well, these books were precious.

Hannibal removed a stack and turned to place them in the little pully that had been rigged up on some light scaffolding to aid the packing. As he did so one of the books slipped off the top and tumbled down.

They both seemed to cry out in unison, and his dancers reflexes had Will moving quickly under it, catching the book before it hit the ground.

“Oof.” He over dramatised the wind being knocked out of him and Hannibal raised a brow.

“My hero.” He chuckled.

Will grinned and opened the book, starting to thumb through it. recipes and… sketches. Mostly of food. He had quickly learned of Hannibal’s artistic interests and talents and so wasn’t surprised to find them there. They were astoundingly beautiful.

He looked up when Hannibal cursed and another book came tumbling. This one opened as it fell, a few loose leafs falling separately. Will wasn’t able to catch the book, which fell with a thud and closed itself. But he did manage to catch a loose sheet as it floated, almost perfectly, into his hand.

He frowned at first, trying to work out what he was holding. Even though it was absolutely clear. He felt colour rise in his cheeks and his heart swell.

“Hannibal?”

Hannibal looked over the railing. “Ah yes. You make a beautiful subject.”

Will looked at the sheet again - a perfect sketch. A rendering of him in his Swan Prince outfit from their ballet on the Dancing With The Stars special when they first met. It made Will’s skin prickle.

“I… never looked that good.” He laughed.

Hannibal looked down again then. A stern look. “You were beauty personified, Will. You always are… though maybe more so in that outfit.”

Will laughed. “Is this your way of telling me you have a swan fetish? Want me to dress up one night? I still have the costume you know…” He cleared his throat and added jokingly, “maybe we

could have a fairy tale themed house warming?"

Hannibal said nothing for a moment, but his eyebrow and corner of his mouth lifted in exactly the same manner. Finally he replied - "I… don't know if I can be trusted to be appropriate around a room full of guests if you will be in feathers."

Will laughed, shaking his head as he lifted the dropped book from the floor, before he thumbed through it too. Recipes. Lots and lots of recipes. For swan.

Will swallowed. What an interesting evening that might be.

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